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Speaker Crisafulli's Opening Day Remarks

As we've seen, fighting to secure that future is hard. Standing up for our principles is controversial and difficult.

Over the last year, we were faced with numerous challenges, from a federal government that tried to coerce us to expand Obamacare to unbridled judicial activism.

Though the challenges we face change over time, our commitment to the core principles we stand on to navigate complex problems should not.

The Medicaid expansion debate was one of the most difficult and tenacious many of us have faced. I was struck by how firmly held our views were on the issue, for or against. How everyone in this chamber had a strong opinion informed by the principles that motivate us.

Members, as you know, my family has been deeply rooted in Florida – both figuratively and literally – for over 150 years.

I was deeply moved by your gift to me when I became your Speaker – a gavel made from the orangewood from one of family's original groves.

Those trees have been standing strong since well before I was born, and some remain upright sentinels of our land even today.

They survive and thrive despite harsh conditions – whether flood, freeze, hurricane, or disease.

Throughout history, trees and their roots have been used to describe human behavior. Psalm 1 even speaks of the difference between deep-rooted trees and chaff that is carried by the whims of the wind.

Members, I am proud of the way you have stood firm on your principles throughout the first half of our term. Whether you were for or against the cornerstone issues that have come before this House, you followed your beliefs and conducted yourselves professionally and cordially.

It reminds me of our trees.

And so, as a token of my appreciation AND a reminder to finish strong, I have a gift for each of you.

It is on your desk. It's a pen made from my family's orangewood. May it be a daily reminder that on matters of principle, we need to stand firm.

We should be proud of this House for leading and standing on principle – that is what we were elected to do; that is what we said we would do; that is what we have done; and that is what we will continue to do.

Yet, we must not confuse 'our principles' with 'our preferences,' for if we simply insist on 'our way or the highway,' we will fail the people of Florida.

Our challenge is to sort out the differences – to put away pride – and to find real solutions.

And so, on matters of preference, we must work together.

I saw that in you last session. We cut taxes by \$400 million. We balanced the budget and secured record education funding. We significantly reduced testing in our schools. We passed local pension reform, and we strengthened families by promoting adoptions.

As we look ahead to the next 60 days, I want us to double-down.

We will do that first by finishing what we started. By the end of this week, the House and Senate will pass three important bills that were part of last year's Work Plan.

We will pass Chair Caldwell's comprehensive water policy bill. As you have heard me say time and time again, water is one of the most precious resources we have. Without access to clean water, we have no agriculture, no food, no recreation, and we have no way to live our lives.

Look at California to see the cost of not having a smart, science-based water policy. California is experiencing one of the worst droughts in the state's history and is facing critical water supply problems. California's drought has had a significant impact on their economy and way of life. In the last two years, their agriculture industry lost billions of dollars and thousands of jobs.

We simply cannot afford that here in Florida. However, we face water quality challenges from Lake Okeechobee to the Indian River to Apalachicola Bay. And, we face a rapidly increasing population that is expected to require an extra 1.3 billion gallons of water per day by 2030. By passing this water policy bill, we can take a comprehensive approach toward addressing Florida's water challenges today before they become crises in the future.

Second, we will pass a bill to expand educational options for students and schools. Chair Fresen's bill will allow persons with disabilities to get a meaningful college education; create safer, more focused learning environments in schools by incenting districts to adopt uniform policies; and expand the Personal Learning Scholarship Account program so families of students

with disabilities can provide their children with a more customized education that better meets their unique needs.

Third, we will pass President Gardiner's priority bill to strengthen pathways to economic independence for persons with disabilities. The bill promotes financial literacy, recognizes employers who hire and support the disabled, and makes the state a model employer for persons with disabilities.

These are three bipartisan bills we can all be proud to support and deliver for Floridians.

Of course, those bills are only a fraction of our work this session. We will continue to have a Member-driven process, and I look forward to helping you accomplish your goals.

As we begin this session, think about the Florida we want to leave our kids. Think about what the legacy of our work should be.

Many of the issues before us will have a significant, lasting impact on Floridians. They present us the ability to create a legacy of opportunity for Florida families. We can create this opportunity for families by protecting our natural resources and empowering people with the tools they need for success.

By improving the health of our natural resources, we create an opportunity for Florida's economy and families to grow. In addition to Chair Caldwell's comprehensive water policy bill, Chair Harrell has filed the Legacy Florida bill to create a dedicated funding source to finally finish the decades-long restoration of the Everglades. By completing this task, we will protect this incredible River of Grass and help secure the water resources needed to sustain South Florida's population growth and development. Our budget will also continue to comply with Amendment 1 and direct substantial funding towards environmental preservation.

There are many ways we can empower individuals with more opportunity, from a strong economy to a quality education to access to healthcare and a secure retirement.

Nothing is more important to empower people than work. A strong economy is the baseline for opportunity and allows every Floridian who wants a job to find one. We've worked together with Governor Scott to create a better climate for job growth, and Florida has had a dramatic economic turnaround. Our state is a national leader in job creation with over 1 MILLION new jobs in the past five years.

We can keep our economy growing by continuing to lower taxes. We all benefit when taxpayers can keep more of their hard-earned money. Should our current estimates hold, this year, Chair Gaetz will unveil an historic \$1 BILLION tax cut proposal that will lower taxes for all Floridians. This will allow businesses to hire more workers and give families meaningful relief so that they can reinvest into our economy.

We can also keep our economy growing by embracing new technologies and tearing down old barriers that suffocate competition. Let's put the free market to work for Florida families. Let's cut red tape and create forward-looking, predictable regulatory frameworks to give companies like Uber and Lyft and other disruptive technologies their day in the sun. Florida should be a state where our regulations welcome innovation, not discourage people from finding new and better ways of doing things. If people in Orlando or Miami or Tallahassee want Chair Workman to be their Uber driver, then we should give them that freedom.

In addition to growing our economy, having quality education options from preschool through postgraduate school are essential to creating opportunity for Floridians.

From helping struggling students read on grade level and expanding school choice options to making college more affordable, expanding vocational education, ensuring our colleges and universities are helping students get jobs after graduation, and creating an emerging preeminence designation so more of our universities can become national leaders in academics and research, we will tackle a broad range of education reforms at every level to provide our students with a first-rate education that equips them for success.

Of course, the opportunity afforded to someone from a job and a good education is limited if a person becomes sick and cannot access quality, affordable healthcare. We need to renew our efforts to attack cost drivers and eliminate barriers to healthcare. Chair Oliva and his Select Committee on Affordable Healthcare Access are looking at innovative ways to do just that. Direct Primary Care, Certificate of Need repeal, Telemedicine, and allowing advanced registered nurse practitioners to prescribe certain medications - to name a few - are all ways to improve Florida's healthcare system.

In addition, I believe the time has come for us to remove the five-year waiting period for Kidcare for lawfully residing immigrant children. These children and their parents have followed our laws and should be able to access the same services as any other Florida family can. This legislature has acted with similar compassion in recent years, and I ask for your support to pass Chair Diaz's good bill.

Lastly, a secure retirement is essential for opportunity to flourish. It is my hope that this is the year we can finally find common ground with the Senate and pass pension reform.

Since our state's pension system was established, the way we work has changed. People used to stay at the same job for their entire careers; members that's not the case today. We need to make our pension system portable to match today's reality. Doing so will let families make the employment choices that are best for them and maintain the financial health of Florida's retirement system. A secure retirement system means Florida won't experience the pension shortfalls going on across the country. A secure retirement system means Florida retirees won't have to see their benefits cut and citizens won't see their taxes raised to bailout a failing system.

That is a brief glimpse at several bills that will expand access to opportunity for Florida families. There are many bills worthy of consideration, and I look forward to seeing your bills move through the process and come to the floor for a vote.

Issues such as the ratification of the new Seminole Compact will no doubt inspire great debate this year.

Whatever side of the compact – or any other issue – you fall on, remember to stand on your principles when you vote because your decision will make a difference in the lives of Floridians for years and even decades to come.

I began my remarks explaining why we miss so many moments with our families to be in the House. We are now in the second and final half of the legislative term. Members, let's make our time here during this session count.

Stand firm.

Fight for what you believe in.

Serve with principle and courage.

And work hard, so that when we sine die in 60 days and see our families again, we can tell them we left them a stronger Florida.

A Florida where they have the opportunity to make any dream come true.